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# Language Learning

*A Quarterly Journal of Applied Linguistics*

VOLUME II, NUMBER 3

JULY-SEPT., 1949

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# LANGUAGE LEARNING

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## EDITORIAL

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

One of the most important factors to consider in making teaching effective is classroom atmosphere. This is especially important in classes dealing with the teaching of foreign languages. Unless the student feels very much at home with his teacher and with his fellow students, he will not be able to achieve the freedom necessary for learning to produce sounds that are strange to him. This freedom cannot be attained if there is any sense of strain or tension either among the students or between the student and the teacher.

To achieve this free and wholesome atmosphere it is necessary for the teacher to maintain an air of cheerfulness and good humor throughout the class; to give each student a feeling of satisfaction in attaining some goal, however small, during each class hour; to prevent the student from being embarrassed in any way; to be as patient as possible with the student's mistakes; to encourage those who are having great difficulty and to avoid controversial discussions which involve personal or subjective opinions (e.g. anything arising out of a disagreeable or deprecating reference to a person's cultural or linguistic problems).

A feeling of security is essential to attaining optimum results in the classroom. This can be partially ensured by a definite routine in procedure — a routine which is varied enough to prevent monotony, but similar enough each day so that the student will have a general idea of what to expect of the teacher and what the teacher will expect of him. An example of this is found in the manner of recitation. By a simple gesture or by some signal the students should know that they are to recite in unison or individually. This will prevent a student from being embarrassed by blurting out an utterance in a loud voice when everyone else is silent and listening to another student's recitation.

Imitation of the teacher (even to an exaggerated degree at first) is essential in striving for an acceptable pronunciation of a foreign language. The student tends to be self-conscious if he is not completely at ease. If the classroom atmosphere is one of congeniality and freedom the stu-

dent will find it easier to imitate and exaggerate the sounds which seem peculiar to him. Strain or an ill-at-ease feeling prevents development of the flexibility which is essential in learning new patterns of structure and sound.

If the teacher can recognize an agitated state of mind it is better not to ask the student to repeat an utterance several times. Many students can be corrected time and again without embarrassing them, but others must be handled carefully. Age and professional position seem to be directly correlated to this point of diminishing returns. The older and more educated a person is, the more careful a teacher must be to observe signs of self-consciousness.

Individual differences must also be considered in connection with imitative ability. To hold all students responsible for the same standard is an impossibility in something as unpredictable as imitative ability. Some find it very easy to make peculiar sounds; others find it difficult. Some can throw themselves into the experience of language learning and forget their self-restraint or pride; others find this difficult and often impossible. The teacher, in each case, needs to discover the utmost capacity of the student in this regard and hold the student responsible for that capacity. This will provide a goal for each individual which will not be beyond his reach.

How exacting should a teacher be in the matter of oral production? How much accuracy should a teacher demand? The decision is easy to make for a word. We can demand high standards for as short an utterance as a word or a sentence containing relatively few difficulties, but in a longer and more complex utterance the student may find complete accuracy too difficult to achieve. Over-correction may discourage the student and interruption of recitation sometimes disturbs him. It is better therefore to concentrate on the correction of a limited number of items at a time until the student can master them, and then add more until he finally reaches a state of near perfection in the whole utterance. It is better also, to wait until the student has finished his utterance, then correct it, and ask him to repeat it. In some cases a few words of encouragement prove an effective stimulus even though the student has not achieved anywhere near the accuracy the teacher might desire.

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The ultimate success of the student in learning a foreign language depends a great deal upon the teacher's ability to maintain a wholesome atmosphere in the classroom and to take into consideration the individual differences of the students.

B. J. W.

## AN EXPERIMENT WITH A WIRE RECORDER IN TEACHING GENERAL PHONETICS

George M. Cowan  
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The purpose of this paper is to make available to others some of the results of an experiment in the use of recording equipment in teaching general phonetics. The experiment was conducted with the phonetics classes of the 1949 summer session of the Canadian Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, held at Caronport, Saskatchewan. Fifty-two students were enrolled in the course. For the most effective personal attention they were divided into eight sections of six or seven students each. Each section met one hour a day. Four instructors taught two sections each daily. The use of the wire recorder as described below was in addition to this program. The machine used was a Webster-Chicago Model 80 wire recorder. It is hoped that the uses described may prove helpful to others and stimulate further experimentation along similar lines.

Illustrative material from actual languages, suitable for general phonetics courses, is not always available. Standard recorded lessons, designed primarily to teach a person a specific language, are available; but only incidentally, and at considerable expense, can they be used to provide a wide variety of illustrative material for general phonetics courses. With the wire recorder, however, we were able to obtain selected recordings in twelve languages for this first experiment.<sup>1</sup> The material recorded from each language was not meant to give a total picture of the phonetics of that language by any means, but rather the data were carefully chosen and arranged with certain phonetic features, for which we wished classroom illustrations, in mind. The recordings included examples of long vowels and consonants, voiceless laterals, pre-aspirated and voiced aspirated stops, implosive and explosive glottalized stops, click stops, labialization and palatalization of consonants,

<sup>1</sup>Finnish, Zulu, French, Telugu, Turkish, Amoy, Tewa, Hindi, Cree, Galla, Amharic, Aztec, and Pame. All but the last two were recorded by native speakers.



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tone, sentence intonations and rhythms. These were variously illustrated in isolated words, contrastive pairs or triads of words, constant frames with changing substitute items, longer phrases, or texts. In most cases each utterance was repeated twice, with sufficient time between for classroom mimicry. Meanings were recorded only incidentally for class interest and ready reference.

The wire recorder proved a valuable adjunct to the daily phonetic drill sections. Additional dictation exercises<sup>2</sup> and samples of assigned oral frame drills,<sup>3</sup> for practice in symbolizing, differentiating, and producing sounds, were recorded by the instructors. Special supplementary drills on the suprasegmental features of tone, stress, and length, were also recorded.<sup>4</sup> By the use of such recordings all of the students, and especially those having difficulty, were given much help which otherwise, because of staff limitations, would have been impossible. This use of the machine had several advantages: (1) By setting up a schedule of half-hour or hour classes with the machine it was possible for additional drills to be given and at the same time retain the emphasis on, and the hearing and attention advantages of, the small sections. (2) As the same recording served

<sup>2</sup>For extensive examples of such dictation exercises see V. Pike, Dictation Exercises in Phonetics, mimeographed, Glendale, 1946.

<sup>3</sup>The student would be given a frame such as [ ah—umi ] with a substitution list such as [ p, f, Q, Q, s, s, š, š, x, x, x, h ]. Successive members of the substitution list were inserted with each repetition of the frame. This proved a helpful limbering up exercise and gave facility in handling non-English sounds and non-English clusters. Actually the frame was designed to help make automatic the preaspiration of stops, following the suggestion of Robert Lado in "Pattern Practice - Completely Oral" in Language Learning, Vol.I, No.1, p.24, in which it was pointed out that the chief benefit of frame drills is in making the frame automatic in habit while focussing attention on the substitute items.

<sup>4</sup>Such frames were given as [ la la la ] with instruction to: (1) Put stress successively (i.e., in successive utterances) on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd syllable, keeping pitch at a monotone and length of syllables the same. (2) Keeping pitch and stress constant, successively add a mora (more or less) of length to each successive segmental phone, shifting the added length with each repetition one place to the right. (3) Keeping length and stress constant, put a contrastive high pitch on the 1st syllable, and with each repetition, move the high pitch one syllable to the right.

for all, one drill instructor, by recording a half-hour or hour of supplementary material, gave required practice to a large number without taking any more of his time than that required to record it. No instructor needed to be present in these extra drill sections, as students could operate the machine. The exact reproduction for each group reduced grading time by eliminating the difficulties previously occasioned by sections instructors' differences in dictating the same material to their classes. (3) Anyone desiring extra drill or wishing to check mistakes on his written transcriptions could put in extra time with the machine, re-playing as often as desired any part of the dictation given. (4) By boosting the volume on the machine drills could be amplified for the benefit of those having unusual difficulty. (5) The fact that the speaker's vocal movements could not be seen forced the student to listen for perceptible acoustic differentiations rather than rely on visual clues. The most difficulty was found in distinguishing sounds differing only in point of articulation. With practice, many students who at first had depended largely on visual clues learned to hear a consistent difference.

The wire recorder made it possible to give drills in intensive, guided listening. Too frequent repetitions by an informant often yielded unintentional variations either through weariness or exasperation. The use of recorded utterances eliminated this. The student also often formed the opinion that the informant varied greatly, when it was his hearing and interpretation of what he had heard that had changed. To make the student aware of how differently he might listen to or hear an identical utterance, special listening drills were given in which the student was asked to listen for one specific thing and ignore all else. With each repetition of the recording he was asked to listen for a different thing at the same point in each utterance. For example, word pairs contrasting long and short stops in Pame<sup>5</sup> were played over many times. The first time the students were asked, "Was the medial consonant in the first of each pair longer, shorter, or the same in length as the medial conso-

<sup>5</sup>Even though the recording was by a non-native speaker, it still served for the purpose of the drill, although no claim was made that all of the same minute details would be true of a native speaker.

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nant in the second of the pair?" On repetition, "Were the syllables beginning with long and short consonants equally stressed?" "Did the stress begin at the same point in each pair?" "Did it begin before, after, or in the middle of the long consonants?" "Was the pitch of the syllables beginning with long and short stops the same?" "Did the release of a long stop have the same tenseness or laxness as the release of a short stop?" This served to alert them to the vast number of phonetic features for which one must listen before jumping to a conclusion as to precisely what the difference or differences between two very similar words may be.

Another exercise was to put before the student a mimographed rough phonetic transcript of a recording with certain symbols (e.g. vowels) omitted. They were asked to listen specifically at the blanks and fill in, in as close a transcription as possible, what they heard on the record at that point. With Amoy all the segmental phonemes were given and the students were asked to draw the general contour of the tones heard on monosyllabic, bisyllabic, and trisyllabic utterances. With an Aztec text they were asked the first time to sketch the intonation of each complete utterance, the second time, the main stresses, the third time the length of vowels. Then they were asked to make a statement as to the correlation or lack of correlation of the three features mentioned. The ability to hear things backward as the wire was rewound, in the case of pitch features especially, interestingly enough proved of some help in checking the impression gained when it was played forward.

The wire recorder also proved a help in building up mimicry span. For example, three sets of Hindi utterances were recorded.<sup>6</sup> Each set began with a very short but com-

<sup>6</sup>One such set (in translation) was as follows:

- The girl is playing.
- The girl is playing today.
- The girl is playing this morning.
- The girl is playing gulidunda this morning.
- The girls are playing gulidunda this morning.
- All of the girls
- All of the girls are playing gulidunda this morning.
- All of the little girls
- All of the little girls are playing gulidunda this morning.
- All of the good little girls
- All of the good little girls are playing gulidunda this morning.

plete utterance at normal speed, about two seconds or less in length. Each utterance was repeated once. Between each utterance enough time was left for up-to-speed mimicry. After each repetition the same utterance was expanded slightly. This continued until the total utterance was 5 to 5.5 seconds long. The class was instructed to mimic, paying special attention to the rhythm and intonation of the total utterance. When the utterances became long enough to cause difficulty, it was noticed that the familiar parts moved along nicely, but the newly added words caused difficulty. To get over this, the new words were given a separate mimicry drill before being added to the utterance. It was also noticed that the class would mimic well up to a certain span and then begin to falter seriously. When this was noticed, the recording was run back several utterances and the class began to work up to the longer span again. Each time they progressed a little further before faltering. In a half-hour or less the better mimics had thus expanded their mimicry span from 2 seconds to 5.5 seconds. No attempt was made to learn meanings, nor recognize isolated words in the process. The aim was mimicry of essentially (to the student) nonsense material and the attention was focussed on the total utterance, rhythm, intonation, and normal speed.

During the last two weeks of the course the students worked with informants. They were required to memorize, and begin to use as soon as memorized, common expressions in the language of the informant. To aid in gaining a rapid command of such phrases, the wire recorder was used. A series of Cree expressions was recorded as follows: first the meaning in English, then the Cree equivalent, then space for mimicry, the same Cree utterance again, then another space for mimicry. The students listened to the recording several times, mimicking and memorizing meanings. The procedure was then changed as follows: immediately after the English meaning was played the volume control was turned to zero so that the first utterance of the Cree equivalent was not heard. The students proceeded to give it by memory. The volume was turned up in time to hear the second repetition of the Cree, giving a prompt and accurate check on the students' memory and pronunciation.

The wire recorder made it possible for the students

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to hear and criticize objectively their own production and mimicry. This was done in two ways: (1) Each student was given a list of phonetically written nonsense "words" to read and record. At a later date, with the list in front of him, he listened to the recording and graded his production as recorded, against the list as written. (2) Some actual language material, either on discs on a standard record player or on a second wire recorder, was played and the student mimicked it. Both the original and the student's mimicry were recorded on the wire recorder. This was played back to the student, and he was asked to evaluate critically his own mimicry as heard alongside the original. The effect on the student was usually one of surprise at how "different" he sounded from the original. Noticeable improvement in some cases was evident upon a second attempt at mimicry. Objective self-analysis made possible in this way seemed to offer real possibilities for conscious and critical self-improvement.

The wire recorder was also used to record oral examinations in phonetics. Previously, oral phonetics examinations had been given by each section leader to his own section during one of the regular class hours. The advantages of recording the exams were: (1) A more relaxed atmosphere while the examinee was reading the exam. He was not upset or unnerved by trying to guess or by actually seeing what grade value the examiner gave each utterance, or by interpreting the examiner's request to repeat an utterance (because of examiner's failure to hear clearly) as indicating a failure to read correctly. Counterbalancing this, however, was the "mike" nervousness of some students. It was found that this tended to decrease as the students became accustomed to the paraphernalia and method. Some students would pause much longer than others between utterances. The examiner (wire recorder operator), by assuming an air of complete lack of hurry and stopping the recorder until they were ready to proceed, was able to lessen, in some cases, the nervous tension buildup during such a pause. Others who, through nervousness or other causes, misinterpreted parts of the exam, were set at ease by rewinding the wire and erasing the mistake. In the case of very soft spoken individuals the recording volume was increased rather than asking them to speak above their natural voice.

(2) A larger number of students could be examined in less time by a single examiner (whose only ability need be to know how to run the recorder) with a minimum of student time lost from class and very little interference with the current work of the section instructors. Each student was out of the class 4 or 5 minutes at the most while he took his oral. (3) The actual grading of the examination was done by three or more members of the phonetics staff listening to the recording as it was replayed. The personal factor, so impossible to eliminate in person to person examinations, was considerably lessened by using the recorder. As the students were identified by number only, in most cases the examiners did not know who they were marking. If they did guess, it was usually very near the end of the examinee's test. In a few cases where a student's voice quality was quite distinct, he was identified immediately, but the fact that the student was not present in person gave the examiners (in their own opinion) a greater objectivity in grading than under the usual system. (4) Individual differences in grading strictness and grading ability of the section instructors were considerably levelled out by having at least three different instructors grade each individual and averaging the grades thus given. (5) Where the examiners were undecided on what they heard, the recording was replayed and, if necessary, the volume was increased. (6) A check on individual progress was possible at later periods during the course as earlier exams could be replayed and compared with later tests. (7) The students could profit by hearing the exams replayed, by themselves criticizing and evaluating the performance of each, and by having drawn to their attention by their instructors, as the record was replayed, sounds which they had missed.

In conclusion, a recorder of adequate recording and playback fidelity for speech forms offers many possibilities as a supplementary aid in the teaching of general phonetics. The advantages are: on-the-spot, selective recording of illustrative materials; practically limitless replays of recorded data for intensive study and evaluation; recording of mimicry along with original mimicked for objective self-criticism; saving of staff hours in giving certain types of supplementary drill; fairer grading of oral tests; and materials could be filed for later use and tests for later progress checks.

## THE PATTERN PRACTICE OF MEANINGS

Edward Anthony  
University of Michigan

The teacher who concentrates on vocabulary has three important duties to discharge. First, he must choose items useful to his students. Second, he must adequately present and explain these items. Third, he must practice these items until their use becomes automatically attached to the experience which they symbolize. It is this third duty which is sometimes neglected, and which will occupy us here. We shall therefore assume that items have been chosen, presented, and explained.

An instructor in driving can quickly explain the mechanism of an auto, the successive operations necessary to set it in motion, turn it, and stop it. His student, however, cannot therefore immediately enter a car and drive surely and easily down the street. A certain amount of gear-clashing, jerking, and sudden stopping is inevitable at first. Only constant practice will cure these faults. A teacher of language likewise cannot expect his student to use words with facility if they have been merely presented. A certain amount of verbal gear-clashing, jerking, and sudden stopping is inevitable. The student must use the items again and again before they are his.

There are several frequently-used techniques for practicing vocabulary items, some useful and practical. Perhaps the most frequent method of practice is that of requiring a sentence from each student using the item in question. Aside from the monotony which often results from such practice, there is a real danger that the students' understanding of the item is incomplete, although the example sentence is right. If, for example, a sentence using actually is elicited from the student, a sentence from a native Spanish speaker might be: Is Mr. Brown actually a teacher? This is, of course, an acceptable English sentence. But, in all probability, the student does not mean what he is saying. The word actualmente in Spanish has a time sense that the cognate actually lacks in English. In order for the teacher to be certain that the student understands, he must require the student to construct a sentence which emphasizes the contrast between actualmente and actually, such as; Was Mr.

Brown actually a teacher? This is an impossible sentence in Spanish with actualmente.

One cannot, of course, suppose that examples freely given will contain elements that will force the meaning to view. Some sort of closely controlled exercises must be evolved. Our first principles for these exercises are taken from grammar pattern practice. Dr. Robert Lado has said, "Pattern practice — completely oral — is one such technique. It consists paradoxically in the conscious substitution of some element other than the chief element being taught so that primary attention is drawn away from it while the entire pattern is repeated. The instructor presents the pattern orally while the students repeat the complete pattern including the substitution."<sup>1</sup> The pattern practice of meanings has, as an additional principle, that clear-cut contrasts of lexical meaning must be forced to view and emphasized in such a manner that student errors are immediately apparent and therefore immediately correctable.

Now, following these precepts, let us first suppose that the general area in which we are operating is Food and Meals. Let us further assume that the following items have already been presented and explained, and are now to be practiced.

I. Items explained and practiced in previous work.

- a. The subject pronouns.
- b. The word eat, the third person singular -s

II. Items explained in the present lesson, to be practiced here.

- a. at six, seven, eight, etc.  
in the morning, in the evening, at noon, at night.
- b. breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper.

We begin, then, with the familiar, with the already practiced and learned items, in the frame he eats. We add one of the new expressions from List II a above. This last does not vary. However, we may vary the subject, since the subject pronouns have already been established. The exercise can be presented orally thus:

Teacher; He eats in the evening.

Student A: He eats in the evening.

Teacher: She.

Student B: She eats in the evening.

etc.

<sup>1</sup>Language Learning Volume I, Number 1, p. 25.



#### THE PATTERN PRACTICE OF MEANINGS

After this has been practiced, we may change in the evening to another expression in IIa and continue the practice.

Having practiced the list in IIa, we turn now to the list of meals in IIb. and proceed in a similar manner: i.e.:

Teacher: He eats breakfast.

Student A: He eats breakfast.

Teacher: She.

Student B: She eats breakfast.

After this has been practiced, we may change breakfast to another expression in IIb and continue the practice.

Up to this point, we have not forced the student to understand what he is saying. But now, after having practiced each individual part of the sentence, we put them together and vary any part of the sentence. Let us take He eats breakfast at seven in the morning, as a basic frame. The teacher then varies any of the three underlined expressions. This has the advantage of forcing the student to understand the contrasts of meaning, for if he makes an error, it becomes immediately evident.

Teacher: He eats breakfast at seven in the morning.

Student A: He eats breakfast at seven in the morning.

Teacher: In the evening.

Student B: He eats DINNER at seven in the evening.

The student must vary two parts of the basic sentence. In the evening is not compatible with breakfast, so the student must substitute either supper or dinner, and can do so only if he understands the meanings of both the phrases supplied him by the teacher and the word which he himself supplies.

If contrasts of lexical meaning are kept constantly in focus, and if these are practiced by meaningful repetition of the type suggested above, some fluency in the use of lexical forms should be attained by the student.

## THE "WHAT" AND THE "WAY"

Dwight L. Bolinger

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The primacy of the spoken language is one of those re-orientations of thinking comparable to the shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric system, or that from creation to evolution. Once the shift is made, everything takes on a different perspective. The inconsistencies that forced the change of view are automatically solved, and it seems impossible that anyone could have believed in the former error.

Like all views that are grounded in popular belief, however, the ramifications of the error are legion, and have to be rooted out one by one. It was not enough to say, once and for all, that the sun was central; it had to be pointed out, patiently, over whole generations, that the earth was only one of many planets; that the earth rotates; that the year is determined by the earth's revolution about the sun—and a hundred other facts as readily deduced from the one grand thesis but not obvious until separately observed and driven home.

The ramifications of written language as "the" language are just as numerous and may take as long to eradicate. It follows, from the main thesis of the primacy of the spoken language, that the distinction of "correct" language, so far as it depends on most-written forms, is unfounded; that outworn spellings are pernicious; that etymological word-divisions (all right versus altogether) need to be revised; but each of these and manifold others have to be tackled separately.

One such bit of folk-lore is that which is often expressed in the phrase "What you say is all right, but I don't like the way you say it." It is obvious from the main thesis that in any sound brought forth by the human vocal mechanism there is no part that can be singled out as a "thing" while other parts are merely ways of doing that thing. All is either thing or manner.

What one encounters here is a reflexion, back into the spoken language, of the superstition of the importance of written language: the traditionally writable features of the sound are regarded as more substantial than the features for which the letter signs are not used. They may be variously shown on the page, of course: italics, punctuation marks, and even (as in Mark Twain's setting of the elocu-

#### THE "WHAT" AND THE "WAY"

tionary speech) wavy lines; but the "words themselves" are always conceived of as the firm substratum, with the residue as ephemeral and relatively unimportant ornamentation.

This ramification, the false dichotomy of "what" versus "way," has enough basis in fact to keep it going beyond the span of life of the other ramifications of the error. Certain features of sound are more important, in most situations, than others. The features that distinguish wheat from oats are more urgent as a rule than those which distinguish oats-like from oats-disliked; the features that distinguish ear from year in some dialects may cause difficulties of communication that compel us to note them, but the variations of resonance that distinguish haughty from humble speech are left to the novelist, and find no place in public documents or courts of law. In addition, the disability of not having all features of the sound writable has been partially overcome by other means: descriptive terms (the haughty and humble just used), circumlocution, etc., so that we are frequently unaware of the insufficiency of the written formula; there is even a kind of vested interest in these halting substitutes.

It takes little imagination, however, to discover situations in which the supposed unimportance of the "way" becomes damaging. In quoting another's discourse, for example, it becomes possible for a speaker to distort completely the meaning of the original, and still imagine that he is reporting truthfully. A lawyer confronts a defendant with the question: Did you or did you not say to Mr. W. on this occasion, "I could kill you for what you've done?" How many wretches have had to answer "yes" to such a question, and suffered for it, when the words were actually uttered upon an intonation profile that clearly implied (and could never imply anything else) that the action set forth was precisely one which the speaker did not intend to carry out? How pervasive is the error one sees in this very exposition, where I fall into the use of implies rather than says; for to say has usually the connotation of that "what," and to imply has that of the "way."

So much, too, for the question of truth and falsity. The "yes" of the courtroom scene was a lying answer, though the victim was not clever enough to see it. Truth and falsehood as a moral issue have been made to adhere

completely to the "what" of language. Any one of us can recall a dozen anecdotes or episodes in our own lives when we have cleverly "evaded" an embarrassing question, and have thereby saved ourselves an attack of conscience; while few but can recall at least one or two instances when we have been cornered, have said yes when the situation demanded no, and have gone about with inner gnawings afterward. If language had been completely described, and if our sense of guilt were made to adhere to the whole of it, there would be very few answers that could be regarded as truthful unless they gave the precise information that the questioner wanted; there would still be mistakes, for people can misunderstand, but if the intent of a question were understood, the person questioned would have to regard it as adequately symbolized and answer accordingly. Instead, we go childishly about our verbal gymnastics with the "what," and feel no remorse at lying with every element of language except our words. As with imply and say, the what-way dichotomy is reflected in this sphere as to evade and to lie.

And what of the language teachers, who ought to know the medium they deal with? I will instance a pet of theirs, the well-known Misplaced Modifier. To use I just want one (they say) is wrong, because just modifies one and accordingly should go next to it. Now this prescriptive argument supposes that the hearer will misunderstand when the just is misplaced; the "what," the words, are spatially conceived, and all discriminative elements of speech except those of temporal order are ignored. Actually no such expression, if naturally spoken, would ever be misunderstood, for the intonation, part of the "way," clearly shows that just is the companion of one.

The importance, socially, of the "unimportant" features may be gauged by the fact that the majority of our emotional misunderstandings as a result of misquoting are probably traceable not to misquoted words but to misquoted "ways." With the "way" the reporter is apt to feel that he may do as he pleases, so that communication features such as gesture and intonation get completely out of control.

In short, the Virginian had the correct measures of the oneness of the communication-complex when he said, "When you call me that, smile."

## REVIEWS

### THE CHICAGO INVESTIGATION\*

#### I

I take it that An Investigation of Second Language Teaching attempted to survey and evaluate what, at the time it was made, was actually going on in the teaching of foreign language (including the teaching of English as a foreign language). Fortunately, or unfortunately, the work of the investigation itself came at a time when there was great activity in making changes in the teaching of language, partly as a result of the popular discussion of the work done in language courses for the armed forces. I suspect that those courses that displayed this great activity in making changes were the ones called the "new" courses, the experimental courses, and the rest were the "old" courses. As indicated in the report neither the "old" courses nor the "new" courses were homogeneous in their practices and objectives. The report seems to indicate, however, that the basic difference that the investigators used to differentiate the "new" courses from the "old" was the greater emphasis upon oral-aural procedures and objectives.

The basic assumption on which the programs of experimental courses rested was that a second language like a first (i.e. native) language, is most naturally acquired in its spoken form. . . . Thus the ear and tongue are to be trained first, and the eye only later. This became the justification of teaching command of the spoken language even where, within the liberal arts tradition, the cultural reading aim could and must not be forsaken.<sup>1</sup>

If this is to be taken as the "basic assumption" of the "new approach" to language learning - i.e. the basic

\*This paper, consisting of comments on chapters II, VII, and VIII of the report of the Chicago Investigation, was read at the Chicago Language Conference held at the University of Chicago from August 30 to September 1, 1948. The full report is contained in two volumes entitled An Investigation of Second Language Teaching by F. B. Agard and H. B. Dunkel, and Second Language Learning by H. B. Dunkel; Ginn and Company, 1948, Boston and New York.

<sup>1</sup>F. B. Agard and H. B. Dunkel, op. cit., op. 260-1.

assumption of what has been often characterized as the application of the more recent developments of linguistic science to the practical problems of teaching foreign language—then it points to a fundamental misunderstanding. For at least ten years some of us have been trying to explain that the fundamental feature of the “new approach” to language learning is not a greater allotment of time, is not smaller classes, is not even a greater emphasis on oral practice, although many of us believe these to be highly desirable. [The fundamental feature of this new approach consists in a scientific descriptive analysis as the basis upon which to build the teaching materials.]

In the Graves and Cowan report on the Intensive Language Program at the end of 1942 occur the following statements.

Moreover, since all experience with intensive language instruction had already shown a high correlation between good results and implementation, it became obvious that the first task of the Committee must necessarily be the provision of the implements of instruction before instruction itself.<sup>2</sup>

All instruction which is not based on a scientific analysis of the language in question is inefficient.<sup>3</sup>

The following quotations are also pertinent here.

The “oral approach” as here advocated depends for its effectiveness not solely upon the fact that there is much oral practice in hearing and in speaking the foreign language, but also and fundamentally upon having satisfactory materials selected and arranged in accord with sound linguistic principles. It is the practical use of the linguistic scientist’s technique of language description, in the choice and sequence of materials, and the principles of method that grew out of these materials, that is at the heart of the so-called “new approach to language learning”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Mortimer Graves and Milton Cowan, *Intensive Language Program*, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Op. cit.* p.18.

<sup>4</sup>C.C. Fries, *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*, University of Michigan Press, 1945, p.7.

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In learning English one must attempt to imitate exactly the forms, the structures, and the mode of utterance of the native speakers of the particular kind of English he wishes to learn. But the person who is untrained in the methods and techniques of language description is not likely to arrive at sound conclusions concerning the actual practices of the native speakers he observes. He will certainly not do so economically and efficiently. And the native speaker of a language, unless he has been specially trained to analyze his own language processes, will be more likely to mislead than to help a foreigner when he tries to make comments about his own language. On the other hand the modern scientific study of language has within the last twenty years developed special techniques of descriptive analysis by which a trained linguist can efficiently and accurately arrive at the fundamentally significant matters of structure and sound system amid the bewildering mass of details which constitute the actual rumble of speech. If an adult is to gain a satisfactory proficiency in a foreign language most quickly and easily he must have satisfactory materials upon which to work- i.e., he must have the really important items of the language selected and arranged in a properly related sequence with special emphasis upon the chief trouble spots. It is true that many good practical teachers have, out of their experience, often hit upon many of the special difficulties and some of the other important matters of a foreign language that would be revealed by a scientific analysis. Usually, however, such good results from practical teaching experience alone are achieved by chance; are not related to any principle and are thus unsystematic and uneven. The techniques of scientific descriptive analysis, on the other hand, can provide a thorough and consistent check of the language material itself and thus furnish the basis for the selection of the most efficient materials to guide the efforts of the learner. . . only with sound materials based upon an adequate descriptive analysis of both the language to be studied and the native language of the student (or with the continued expert guidance of a trained linguist) can an adult make the

maximum progress toward the satisfactory mastery of a foreign language."<sup>5</sup>

The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. It is not enough simply to have the results of such a thorough-going analysis; these results must be organized into a satisfactory system for teaching and implemented with adequate specific practice materials through which the learner may master the sound system, the structure, and the most useful lexical materials of the foreign language.<sup>6</sup>

[In order to avoid another type of misunderstanding, let me insist that I do not mean that this descriptive analysis of the structure of the language being learned and that of the native language of the learner constitute in themselves the materials to be taught. These analyses precede and furnish the groundwork for the building of the materials to be mastered and the ordering of them in a proper sequence. Dr. Pike, for example, spent more than a year (1941-1942) making a structural analysis of the intonation of American English and then the results of this study and others were used in the building of the exercises used by the English Language Institute in the teaching of pronunciation, both productive and receptive.

In the summary chapter of the report some space is given to commenting on the "materials" of the "Experimental Courses" (pp. 284-5),\* but there is nothing to indicate whether these materials were based upon a satisfactory structural analysis of the language to be learned and whether any systematic attention had been paid to a parallel analysis of the native language of the student being taught. In examining the teaching of English as a foreign language five training centers were used, but I could find in the report no description or discussion of the specific

<sup>5</sup>Op. cit. p.5.

<sup>6</sup>Op. cit. p.9.

\*Page references in the text of these comments refer to *An Investigation of Second-Language Teaching*, op. cit.



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materials used in any of these centers.

It seems to me a mistake<sup>7</sup> to examine and discuss the "new" courses in language teaching, centering attention primarily upon externals of procedure (such as the amount of oral-aural practice), and ignore the fundamental matter of this new approach to the basis upon which to build the materials for teaching. It is in the matter of structural analysis that linguistic science has made special advances during the last twenty years and it is our belief that in the struggle to find solutions for the many practical problems facing us in learning and teaching foreign language we cannot afford to neglect to explore the contributions which the new materials of structural analysis might make.

What I have said thus far leads to the first suggestion I would make concerning "next steps". We need, I think, much more complete descriptive analyses of the languages to be taught. The advances of structural linguistics have led to the asking of many questions concerning language systems that we did not ask formerly, and the asking of these questions has led us to varieties of new information that seem to have great practical significance for learning and teaching language.

These descriptions themselves will not be enough. We must have careful and systematic comparisons of the structural analysis of the language to be taught with the structural analysis of the native language of the student. The materials for such comparisons are now only fragmentary and not easily accessible. And if such analyses and comparisons are to be usable for those who build texts and

<sup>7</sup>It seems to me also a great mistake to equate the language teaching program of the armed services with the "new approach", or to assume, as is done in the book referred to in this report (p. 279 footnote), P.F. Angiolillo, *Armed Forces Foreign Language Teaching* (New York: F.S. Vanni, 1947), that intensive courses and other new emphases in language instruction (English for Foreigners, for example), stem from the ASTIP program (p. 406, 407, 421). Intensive language courses have been a feature of the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America since 1937. The investigations that lay back of the teaching materials of the English Language Institute began in 1938 and the first intensive course of that Institute began in the summer of 1941. The teacher training programs centering in this type of foreign language teaching began in the summer of 1942.

The report of a Special Committee, prepared for the M.L.A. Commission on Trends in Education, gives the following concerning the Foreign Area and Language Study Curriculum of the ASTIP (p. 4). "This curriculum was based for the most part on the experience derived from the Intensive Language Program of the American Council of Learned Societies, a civilian training project which at that time had been in operation for two years."

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develop teaching materials they must also be expressed in terms that can be understood by the profession of language teachers.

## II

Concerning that part of the report that deals with English as a foreign language (Chapter VII) I must confess that there is much that I do not understand. The chapter ends with summing up "the two urgent needs of instruction in English as a foreign language for foreign students studying in this country." It insists upon "(a) a raising of the general standard required and (b) the preparation of materials which will enable students to cover this higher level of language. . . ." It advocates also that students be required to have mastered much more English before they come to this country. (p. 277)<sup>8</sup>

The investigators were led to this conclusion from general observation and from the results of tests given to students in several training centers.

We began our search for standards and our construction of tests with the assumption that most of the existing standards tended to be too low. We came to this conclusion from having noticed the difficulties of foreign students at our own university, students who had been cleared by various training centers, but who were, none the less, proving deficient in English. (p. 254.)

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<sup>8</sup>I should oppose vigorously the view that students be excluded from this country until they had developed a "satisfactory" English. The mastery of a "good" English can proceed much more rapidly and efficiently in this country than in a foreign country partly because the connections between new symbols and direct experience are much more real and partly because contextual orientation can proceed effectively here which would be impossible in the foreign country. Besides, learning the mechanics of English constitutes only a part of the total task assumed by the English training centers in this country. The best of them have become real laboratories in intercultural adjustments and that part of their work can most effectively be managed in connection with the common struggle of students from various countries to develop a control of the language itself while living in this country.

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The phrase "who had been cleared by various training centers" seems to imply that the training center had certified that the equipment in English of the students for the work they were to do in the university was satisfactory. If that is the fact it surprises me on two counts: (1) that the admissions officer of the university should at that time have thought it worth while to ask for certification in English from a training center rather than depend on his own resources; and (2) that any training center would at that time have been willing to give a general recommendation for English. I suspect that "cleared by various training centers" simply means "having attended various training centers."

The results of the tests given to students in the several training centers appear in the scores of various tables (pp. 256, 258, 260, 262, 265) and are used as evidence that the standards are extremely "low." These tables are based on the scores of approximately 200 students in five training centers. It seems to be assumed that these scores are of students who were ready to leave the center for other work, and whose equipment in English had been approved as satisfactory by these centers.

If the scores from the English Language Institute were used, they included those of students in the beginning sections as well as those of students in advanced sections; those who had just arrived in this country as well as those who had been here more than two months; those of the wives of students (wives who did not plan to study in any school or college), and those of visitors to this country who had come for only two months of intensive work in English and would return to their countries immediately after the course. It seems to me that the only conclusion possible from these scores is that our training centers are serving those of a considerable range of achievement in English. In the English Language Institute the separate classes are homogeneous with not more than 10 students to a section and cover from six to ten different levels of achievement.

Concerning one table (p. 265) of 197 students in 7 centers, the writers of the report say "These scores were all made by students nearing the end of their training program." The writers should probably have said "near the end of a course of session" for they go on in the very next sentence to remark, "It is, of course, impossible to judge

how many of them will stay on (either by choice or force) for further training in English before taking up other work."

So far as I can see from the summary here, there seems to be no evidence whatever concerning what the "standards" are, and nothing upon which to decide concerning raising or lowering them. Everyone will agree that students in our colleges and universities whether native or foreign should have an adequate command of English for the work they undertake. It is obvious too that foreign speaking students who attend our law schools will need to have a much more complete command of English than those who do graduate work in physics or chemistry. To insist as the report does (p. 261) that "in aural comprehension he (the foreign student) must be up to native standards" is to demand the impossible. For the native user of a language, the symbol, with the wide range of experience it stimulates, is so much a part of the very texture of his thought that he exercises great freedom in turning attention upon any aspect of this experience in line with the pressing needs of his thinking. The "meanings" of words are, therefore, more fluid than we realize. For the foreign speaker of a language who learns this new language as an adult, the words as stimuli probably never function with anything like the same fullness and freedom as they do for a native. In this connection I would remind you of Sapir's comment made nearly twenty years ago.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that an English speaking person's command of French or German is psychologically in the least equivalent to a Frenchman's or German's command of his own language. All that is managed in the majority of cases, is a fairly adequate control of the external features of the foreign language.<sup>9</sup>

But this emphasis in the report does point to kinds of work that we greatly need. We need first more tests that are valid instruments for measuring various areas of linguistic ability, aural comprehension, oral production, struc-

<sup>9</sup> Edward Sapir, "The Case of Constructed International Language," in *Actes du Deuxième Congrès International de Linguists*, p. 87.

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tural production, receptive response to the clues of structural meanings, receptive response to specific areas of lexical meaning, and production in specific areas of lexical meaning. The task here is huge and will require more resources than are now available for this type of work. These tests must, as indicated in the report, have high ceilings.

We need next to have correlations between scores on these various tests and successful use of English by students in a variety of subject matter fields. We must expect that the requirements of widely different fields will vary greatly. Perhaps the greatest immediate need of teaching of English as a foreign language is valid tests with score norms that mean something.

### III

Before concluding let me touch briefly one or two other matters that have a bearing upon our "next steps."

#### A

[The more we deal with English as a foreign language the more we are impressed with the need of special materials for each linguistic background. "Foreign" language teaching is always a matter of teaching a specific "foreign" language to students who have a specific "native" language background.] The problems of the Chinese student are very different from those of the Spanish speaker. The Portuguese speaker does not need a whole set of drills both in recognition and in production that are necessary for Spanish speakers. There should be provision for the developing of satisfactory new materials for a variety of linguistic groups that we are not now equipped to serve. (Koreans, Turks, Syrians, Arabs). But in connection with this principle there is another consideration that needs special comment here. In this country, whatever foreign language is taught is directed to those who speak English as their native language, and many of the problems of this foreign language teaching arise out of the special character of the English language. It is not enough for the foreign language teachers to be able to speak English; to be effective they should know English — its sound system, its structural system, and its vocabulary — from the point of view of a descriptive analy-

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sis in accord with modern techniques. Teachers of foreign language and, we believe, English speaking students, electing foreign language would improve the efficiency of their approach to a foreign language by devoting a brief time to a preliminary descriptive survey of the chief features of English. Whether the gain would be as significant as we believe could only be learned from a satisfactorily controlled experiment.

B

The report stresses the need for qualified drill instructors, and points out the need of training in "the special technique of drilling." Let us approve heartily. The view that anyone who speaks a language is by virtue of that fact alone satisfactorily equipped to handle the language drills is certainly not tenable. "Pattern practice" makes more demands upon the resourcefulness of a teacher than perhaps any other phase of language teaching. In practical courses where the aim is learning the language rather than learning about the language, pattern practice is the most important aspect of the teaching. We need to pool our experience in an effort to develop and perfect new techniques that will make the limited time we have for drill pay fullest dividends.

C

The report says little concerning other matters of the training of teachers. I should like to urge that professional language teachers cannot afford to neglect the contribution which the scientific study of language, historical and descriptive, has made and is making to our knowledge of the nature and function of language, and to our tools for the observation and analysis of its structural system. That these matters can be taught successfully and helpfully to the average college student in a very reasonable time has been amply demonstrated by the work of Drs. Pike and Nida and their assistants of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The practical value of this material seems to be demonstrated by the tremendous enthusiasm of the language teachers who have had this training. Measured results are not

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available and may not be possible to obtain, but certainly the language teaching profession cannot afford to ignore completely the tremendous activity in exploring the use of new tools that is going on in the scientific study of language.

Unfortunately most linguistic studies in the new approach present such a changed vocabulary, method of work, and point of view that many of the older scholars find considerable difficulty in understanding what has happened. And yet the newer approach (which I prefer to call structural linguistics) is not particularly difficult in itself; it is simply confusing to those whose thinking in linguistic matters has been channelled by the traditional methods and materials of grammatical study. [One of our important next steps must be to bring linguistic scientists and practical language teachers into closer understanding in order that each may profit from the labors and the experience of the other.]

Of all the matters that call for immediate attention in the "next steps" of investigations for language teaching I should choose, for practical purposes, the following as the two most pressing.

(1) More complete descriptive (or structural) analyses of the languages to be taught, carefully and systematically compared with a parallel analysis of English, and expressed in terms to meet the experience of the profession of language teachers.]

(2) Practical tests that are valid instruments for measuring the various areas of linguistic ability - aural comprehension, oral production, structural production, receptive response to the clues or signals of structural meaning, receptive response to specific areas of lexical meaning, and production in specific areas of lexical meaning, - tests that have high ceilings and for which we can get meaningful score norms.

Charles C. Fries  
University of Michigan

## NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Diplomatic School of the Latin American Institute will offer a 32 week review course for college graduates in preparation for the foreign service examinations. Groups will form in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles starting in February. For further information write: 900 Park Avenue, New York 21, N. Y.; 716 N. Rush St., Chicago 11, Ill.; or 650 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles 14, California.

The Orientation and English Language Institute of the University of California will offer a program for foreign students planning to enter an American University. The purpose is to perfect the student's knowledge of English and to orient him to American life. The course is from July 31 to September 8, 1950. For further information write: Orientation and English Language Institute, University Extension, University of California, Berkeley 4, California.

The Far Eastern and Russian Language School of the University of California offers full time intensive (20 hours per week) programs in Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages and cultures. For further information write: Far Eastern and Russian Language School, University Extension, University of California, Berkeley 4, California.

The English Language Institute of the University of Michigan offers full time instruction in English for Latin Americans and other foreign students. The summer term begins June 23. For further information write: Miss B. J. Wallace, 1522 Rackham Bldg., Ann Arbor, Michigan.

R. A.



## READERS' EXCHANGE

Dear Sirs:

If I may say one word about the setup of the Journal in its new form, I would like to point out the value of fitting the electric typewriter which does the printing of the text with some of the indispensable type, e.g. /ə/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/, etc. This would add much to the neatness and legibility of the Journal; also I think usage regarding the use of // and ( ) or even \*|| as boxes for phonetic symbols should be unified. (On page 41, square brackets; on page 49, slanting strokes.) As for the contents themselves, I think there has been a tendency for articles to repeat themselves somewhat, but the last number seems on the upgrade again; I think, personally, that such items as appear on page 71 (Readers' Exchange) could be done away with altogether, and more bibliography inserted instead. . .

Faculté des Lettres,  
Montreal, PQ, Canada

Yours very truly,  
J. P. Vinay

1) We hope to obtain the type you mention. At present it is impossible for a variety of reasons. We agree that it would be an improvement. 2) Miss Pike's notation was phonetic, therefore square brackets were used. Dr. Shen's notation was phonemic, and hence slant lines were used. This has come to be the accepted style for most present day linguistic writing. 3) We feel that a Journal of this sort exists for its readers, and that the Readers' Exchange column provides, as our prospectus preceding the first issue stated, "a section devoted to articles, letters, and questions from subscribers: an opportunity to exchange ideas with others in one's own field."



